READING X

ON BRINGING BACK THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

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This article argues for the re-adoption of the principles of war as basic conceptual tools of an officer.

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Today, there is increased realization that the study of principles of war should be an integral part of an officer's education and training. While this is not a new subject, the interest in it in recent years has been less than overwhelming. It is time to re-examine the principles in light of today's environment. The author asks several questions that are appropriate for consideration.

PRINCIPLES are "the fundamental ideas or rules in accordance with which practical activity takes place in a specific field**."'**[1] What military theorists have long referred to as the principles of war are, in fact, misnamed. Rather than dealing with war as a whole, these "fundamental ideas" are operational in nature. They are more applicable to operational strategy, operations and tactics than to the technical, logistic and social aspects of war.[2] These principles are the underpinnings of operational theory. In any particular situation, they have existed in a dynamic balance, or imbalance, very much dependent upon the objective conditions which defined that situation.[3]

For the student of war, the principles provide a frame of reference within which to examine past events. By gaining an appreciation of the relationship of one principle to another, and of the effect of conditions upon their application, an officer can train his mind and judgment so that he will be able to deal with the problems he may find in the future[4] To the officer who has been so educated, the principles also provide a set of proven guides, descriptive rather than prescriptive, which he can use to evaluate a plan or operation when the assumptions of more rigidly prescriptive doctrine may prove to have been false.

If one intends to reincorporate the principles of war into the system of officer education and training, four questions immediately commend themselves for consideration. What principles should be adopted? How should they be taught? Where should they be recorded? How should they be used in practice?

O *What principles should be adopted?* The idea of principles of war is not new. Both Jomini and Clausewitz wrote about principles of war, as did Marshal Foch and any number of 19th-century military theorists. However, it was J. F. C. Fuller who first listed, or gave names to, eight of the nine principles now incorporated into Field Manual (FM) 100-1, *The Staff Officers Field* Manual. If Fuller named them, the US Army adopted them in the 1920s and later defined them.

Until a few years ago, with the publication of the current FM 100-5, *Operations,* the US Army's principles of war existed generally in the form seen in Figure 1. These nine principles are not immutable, and all authorities are not in agreement about what the principles of war are. However, these provide a starting point, and, by now, they have the weight of custom behind them. Most US Army officers have come into contact with these nine at one time or another, though perhaps few were properly instructed in their significance or correct application.

It would be appropriate to examine these principles to determine their adequacy, both in *toto* and individually. Some questions arise immediately. Are nine principles too many or too few? Surely, if one is looking for conceptual guideposts, there is a limit to the number of principles one can adopt without being dogmatic or redundant. Are these nine principles the correct ones? Should some be added, dropped or modified?

Ought not the principle of mass demand concentration of *superior* combat power at the decisive place and time? What of economy of force? Should a commander not allocate minimum essential combat power to all efforts, recognizing that profligacy in any action may result in a Pyrrhic victory? Then, there is unity of command. Fuller wrote of cooperation. It would seem that unity of effort would make a better principle as that is the end sought by both unity of command and cooperation.

One might also wish to re-examine surprise and security. Sometimes they produce confusion because they are apparently, but not truly, opposites. Surprise has to do with the ability of one's opponent to react to one's moves. Security demands that you not be taken unawares. Both principles seem to be necessary, but might require re-titling or re-definition. Of course, careful instruction can usually prevent any misunderstanding.

PRINCIPLES OF WAR

Objective: Direct all efforts toward a clearly defined, decisive and attainable goal. The ultimate goal of war is the fulfillment of the policy for which the war is being fought. The accomplishment of this goal often requires the defeat of the enemy's armed forces or the destruction of his means or will to resist. At lower echelons of command, the goal may be the seizing of terrain or possibly the retention of terrain. Goals of smaller units are frequently altered in campaigns and wars, but seldom in the midst of battle. The principle of the objective is applicable at all echelons.

Offensive: Seize, retain and exploit the initiative. By maintaining the initiative, the commander preserves his freedom of action and enhances the morale of his troops. The principle of the offensive applies not only to offensive operations but also to the defensive. An offensive spirit must be inherent in the conduct of defensive operations, for a prolonged and passive defense breeds unrest, lowers morale and surrenders the advantage of intangibles to the enemy. An active defense, conducted with the spirit of the offensive, keeps the enemy off balance, restricts his ability to attack and enhances security. In adhering to the principle of the offensive, the commander sets the pace and determines the course of battle, exploits enemy weaknesses and is better prepared to capitalize on unexpected developments.

Mass: Concentrate combat power at the decisive place and time. The commander must choose the time and place, and he must also determine what combat power is available to him and how much is needed. Since combat power is the total of physical means and moral means available to a commander, his available combat power is a function of numbers, quality and state of morale. The principle of mass leads to success when a commander achieves superiority in combat power over his rival. Through proper application of the principle of mass, numerically superior forces can be defeated.

Economy of Force: Allocate *minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.* This principle is a corollary to the principle of mass, for it is a method of achieving mass. And like the principle of mass, the principle of economy of force requires the commander to choose the time and place for secondary efforts and to determine the amount of physical resources that comprise minimum essential combat power at that time and place. Inherent in both the principle of mass and the principle of economy of force is the idea that all available resources must be employed in the most efficient and effective manner.

Maneuver. Move and position military forces in a way that furthers the accomplishment of the *mission.* Maneuver is also a corollary of the principle of mass, for it-is another means of achieving a decisive superiority of combat power. Movement and positioning must always be undertaken with the intent to place the enemy at a relative disadvantage. Proper movement and positioning frequently achieves results that other-wise could be achieved only at heavy cost in men and materiel. In many situations, the principle of maneuver can be applied only in conjunction with the effective employment of firepower.

Unity of Command: For every objective, there should be unity of effort under one re*sponsible commander.* Unity of effort requires that all elements of a force work harmoniously toward a common goal, and it implies the development and coordination of the full combat power of the available forces. Cooperation further contributes to unity of effort, but only when a single individual is responsible for the activities of a group can the group operate at its peak efficiency in its quest to achieve an assigned goal. Coalition warfare creates a challenge for the principle of unity of command because of the unwillingness of groups to place their resources under the control of a commander from one of the other groups in the coalition.

Surprise: Accomplish your purpose before your enemy can react effectively. Surprise is a most effective and powerful weapon in war, and it can decisively shift the balance of combat power. With surprise, success out of proportion to the energy exerted can be achieved. Surprise results from striking the enemy at a time and place for which he is not fully prepared. Speed, cover, deception, effective intelligence, effective counterintelligence, variations in tactics and variations in methods of operation are some of the factors that contribute to the gaining of surprise.

Security: Never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage. Proper security infers that a commander prevents surprise of his own forces, maintains his freedom of action, avoids annoyance by the enemy and denies information to the enemy. Since risk is inherent in war, application of the principle of security does not imply undue caution and the avoidance of calculated risk. Security can often be enhanced by the seizure and retention of the initiative.

Simplicity: Prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and clear, concise orders to ensure *thorough understanding.* In all communications, the commander should make every reasonable effort to eliminate the slightest chance of misunderstanding; simplicity contributes to this end. Simplicity does not infer that precise, detailed and necessary information should be withheld from those who need such information to operate effectively.

Source: Lieutenant Colonel John W. Campbell, "Evolution of a Doctrine: The Principles of War," *Marine Corps Gazette, December 1970,pp39-42*.

Figure 1

In re-adopting the principles of war, it would be useful to restore the one-sentence definitions which are not present in FM 100-1. The most obvious reason for this is the need for clarity. For example, discrimination between the principles of security and surprise is essential if one is to understand fully the object of both. This discrimination is possible with the precise nature of the definition. Precision of definition promotes a common vocabulary of military theory, and such definition greatly facilitates the instruction of students new to the study of the military art. Whether the traditional list of nine principles is retained or modified, it is a good starting point for the process of redefinition. Properly constructed and precisely defined, the principles of war will become a useful tool for the military officer.

o How should the principles be taught? The principles of war and the study of the history of the military arts[5] are synergistic. The principles provide a framework within which to examine operational history. This study, in turn, gives the student a feel for the interrelationship between the principles and the influence of objective conditions on their application. The vehicle for this study is the battle/campaign analysis.

Before undertaking the analysis of battles and campaigns, it is wise to memorize the precise, one-sentence definitions shown in Figure 1. While some would object to this sort of memorization as scholasticism, it is an essential first step to understanding.

In any intellectual discipline, one must first understand the conceptual tools before they can be used as intended. Each of these definitions has certain key words which contain the essence of the idea of that principle. It is of the utmost importance, however, to remember that learning the definitions of the principles of war is not an end in itself. It is only means to an end. That end is the enhancement of one's powers of discrimination on the battlefield.[6] Once the principles are committed memory, one can learn the techniques of battle/campaign analysis. Figure 2 provides an easily mastered format for battle/campaign analysis. The point of the battle/campaign analysis is to examine real events, determine as accurately as possible what happened,

BATTLE/CAMPAIGN ANALYSIS

Clausewitz distinguished between the simple historical narrative and "the *critical approach"* by listing three different intellectual activities which together constitute the latter. These were:

- First, the discovery and interpretation of equivocal facts.
- Second, the tracing of effects back to their causes.
- Third, the investigation and evaluation of means employed,
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This Clausewitzian model provides the intellectual framework within which to develop the techniques of battle and campaign analysis.

Two things must be clearly understood. First, when we speak of battle and campaign analysis, we do so in the broadest sense. That is, we treat it as an exercise that looks beyond the discrete events that constituted a particular battle or campaign and evaluate those events in terms of the background against which they were played out. We also consider such precepts of military theory as the principles of war. Second, while knowledge of specific facts is necessary, it is a means to an end rather than the end itself. Acquisition of this knowledge completes only the first of Clausewitz' three activities. The vital part of the process rests in the second and third, tracing effect to cause and evaluating the means employed.

A battle or campaign analysis should consist of two major elements: a historical summary and a critique. Because battles and campaigns are dialectic to the extent that their outcome is the sum of the efforts of two opposing forces, the historical summary should contain three elements. These are a statement of the opposing commander's intentions, an explanation of why they sought to do whatever it was they intended and an explanation of how they went about accomplishing their aims.

These are the elements of the first three paragraphs of the five-paragraph operation order in a somewhat different sequence. A commander's intention is normally his *mission. -The situation* normally defines the broader setting in which the commander finds himself, and the *execution* tells how he will accomplish his mission. The historical summary should be just that, a summary. It must, however, provide sufficient detail to support the analysis. Obviously, if the facts are incorrect, the analysis must fail as well.

The second and more useful element should consist of the analysis, or critique, of the commander's actions, again supported by facts or examples. It is necessary to take a position as to why each commander succeeded or failed, whether the actions they took were appropriate given their intentions and whether their immediate intentions were valid given the situation and their long-range goals.

If their actions were inappropriate, then look for possible alternatives. Evaluate how well the commanders applied the principles of war. State which principles they seemed to emphasize and which they neglected, and to what end. Show an appreciation for the effects of doctrinal organizational, strategic, tactical, technological, logistical or personal limitations within which each commander had to function. Finally, state the significance of the outcome of the battle or campaign.

Carl von Clausewim. *On War edited* by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton University Press. Princeton, N.J., 1976, pp 141 and 578.

Ultimately, the battle/campaign analysis requires the student of war to sit in judgment of former military leaders. It is through this disciplined value judgment (judgment based upon facts) that the historian is set apart from the chronicler.

OUTLINE

Battle/Campaign Analysis

I. Historical Summary
   a. What were the commanders trying to do?
   b. Why was that necessary?
   c. How did each intend to accomplish his aim?

II. Analysis.
   a. Was each commander's aim consistent with his greater goals (national policy in the case of strategy; strategy in the case of the engagement)? Did he have any alternatives which were better?
   b. Were the commander's actions consistent with their intentions?
   c. Why did each succeed or fail?
      (1) Effect of conditions (space, time, technology employed, composition of forces, geography, and so forth) on the outcome.
      (2) Application of principles of war.
   d. What was the significance of the battle or campaign?

Figure 2

Identify the effects of objective conditions and subjective decisions, draw some conclusions as to why things turned out the way they did and speculate as to whether other outcomes were possible. Like the principles of war, battle/campaign analysis is only a means to the end of greater understanding, not just of any single battle or campaign, but of those things both abstract and concrete that affect military operations.

Because conditions vary, a student of war is safe in drawing general conclusions only after analyzing a great number of battles or campaigns which occurred under a wide variety of historic, geographic, sociopolitical and technological conditions. Only then can the general be separated from the particular with some degree of assurance.

It is fair to say that the technique of battle/campaign analysis is the most which can be taught. Practice and experience in using it will come only with time. The wisdom to draw correct conclusions must originate within each officer. Because the technique is both basic and intellectual, it belongs in the field of education rather than training. Further, it would seem to be accomplished best in undergraduate institutions, at West Point or in Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

It is essential that its intellectual nature be preserved, or it will rapidly degenerate into rote memorization and produce few benefits. At the same time, should the Army ever develop a coordinated system of military education, it is a process which could be reintroduced at the staff and war colleges at progressively higher standards of sophistication. At those levels, it could, and perhaps should, be combined with a survey of military theory to broaden the officer's intellectual grasp of war along with his technical abilities.

Where should the principles be recorded? This question really addresses the issue of whether principles of war have a place in US Army doctrine. Here, there is a dilemma. It has already been stated that principles of war are an intellectual and theoretical tool. Though doctrine is no more than received, or approved, theory, for the past two decades at least, the US Army has approached tactics and operations as technical rather than intellectual processes.

At the lowest level of the spectrum, this is, no doubt, appropriate. Minor tactics are almost entirely technique. However, the result has been that all our doctrinal manuals tend to be detailed and directive rather than general and conceptual. We publish cookbooks rather than works of military theory, and principles have little use therein.

The only possible exception of any consequence is FM 100-5, intended by its author as a sort of conceptual manual, though to a certain extent its fascination with technical detail conceals its intellectual merit. It is in such a "battle book" that the principles might find a home.

▪*How should the principles be used in practice?* The easy answer is that they should not. The real purpose of these guides is that "by total assimilation with his mind and life, the commander's knowledge must be transformed into a genuine capability".[7] But a properly educated commander may find that in addition to helping him to develop his judgment and powers of discrimination (coup *d' oeil)* through the proper study of history, the principles provide him with a dynamic model against which to test his plans and concepts.

The commander must avoid, at all costs, using the principles as a checklist. He must remember that it is the balance of the various principles, among themselves and in the context of the situation in which he finds himself, that is important. Then, as Fuller wrote:

It is, however, an undoubted fact that the general who places his trust in the principles of war, and who trusts in them *the more strongly the fog of war thickens, almost inevitably beats the general who does not.*[8]

NOTES

[1] Colonel V. Ye. Savkin, 7he *Basic Principles of Operational Art and* Tactics *(A Soviet View),* Superintendent of Documents. US Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.. 1972, p 119 .

[2] Michael Howard, The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy," *Foreign Affairs.* Volume 57, Number5. Summer 1979. pp 975-86. Baron de jomini, *The Art of War,* translated by Captain G. H. Mendell and Lieutenant W. P. Craighil, J. B. Lippencott Co., Philadelphia, Pa., 1862, p 15.

[3] Colonel J. F. C. *Fuller*,, "The Principles of War, With Reference to the Campaigns of 1914-1915," *The Journal of* the Royal United Service I*nstitution,* February 1916, pp 1-40. Colonel J. F. C. Fuller. *The Reformation of War,* Hutchinson and Co., London, Eng.. 1923, pp 24-56.

[4] Carl von Clausewitz, *On* War, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 1976, pp 141 and 578.

[5] The study of the application of man's creative intelligence to the ordered use of force.

[6] Clausewitz, op. *citt., p* 141.

[7] *Ibid.,* p 147.

[8] Fuller, *The Reformation of War, op. cit.,* p 28.

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